

**ANANTA SAYANAM**

*By The Same Author*

THIRUVONAM: A study of Kerala's National Festival.

SASTA WORSHIP IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMBANDI AND OTHER STORIES

# ANANTA SAYANAM

(The Temple of the Forest)

*(Illustrated)*

BY

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*of The Mail, Madras*

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## PREFACE

TO the gay tourist, the devout pilgrim, and the casual visitor to Travancore, the sight of hoary Hindu shrines, with magnificently sculptured gopurams, is a very impressive and thrilling one.

The most far-famed among them is the Padmanabha temple (Ananta Sayanam), at Trivandrum, one of the 12 sacred regions of *Malainadu* sung in the hymns of Vaishnavite Alwars. It is the richest religious institution in the State and is dedicated to Vishnu, the deity worshipped by an overwhelming majority of Hindus. It displays great variety in structure, size, and ornamentation. The tall and gigantic gopuram, with the golden stupis or domes on the top, has beaconed to it visitors and votaries through the years that are past, suggesting in a way that within its bosom shines the soothing light of beauty and bliss.

As one steps within the temple, and the treasure that lies within unfolds itself, one gapes in silent wonder. He asks himself: "Could human hands have ever created it? Could they ever have risen to such aesthetic height?" Built in the Dravidian style of architecture, it is a superb example of the wonderful work of ancient India's artists in stone. The elaborateness of the details, the boldness of execution, the conception of the motif, the delicacy of carving, and the calm dignity and simple grace that adorn it reflect the robust outlook of the master-minds of bygone days, who loved to worship art and beauty.

This book tries to tell, as shortly and accurately as possible, the origin of this temple, its antiquity, festivals, architecture, paintings, etc.

I am grateful to the Editors of the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, the *All-India Weekly*, the *New Review*, the *Scholar*, the *Sunday Standard*, the *National Standard*, and the *Indian Express* for permission to reprint my articles published in them. I should also express my gratitude to the Department of Information, Government of Travancore, for lending the blocks relating to the mural paintings. They greatly enhance the value of the publication.

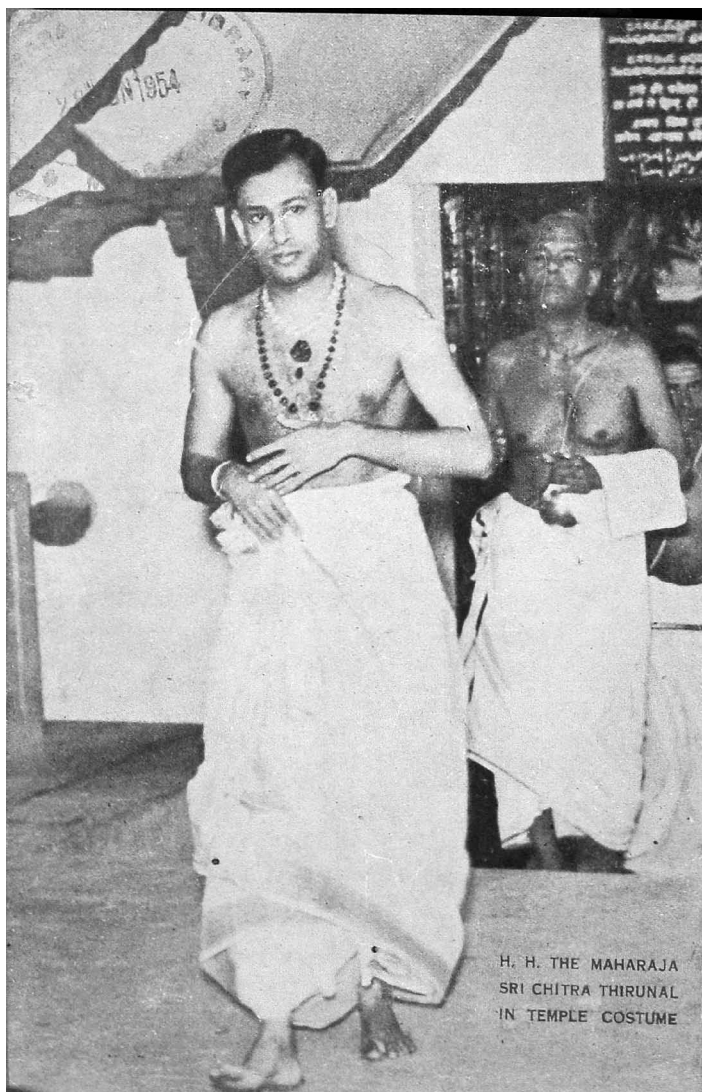
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BALA RATNAM



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H. H. THE MAHARAJA  
SRI CHITRA THIRUNAL  
IN TEMPLE COSTUME

# ANANTA SAYANAM

(THE TEMPLE OF THE FOREST)

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## CHAPTER I

### Introductory

THE temples of Travancore are of hoary antiquity and their constructional design, architectural beauty, and sculptural wealth have evoked considerable interest at the hands of tourists and pilgrims. They occupy a prominent place in India's religious life.

Of the 108 temples sacred to the Vaishnavites, 11 are in Travancore. Hymns in their praise have been sung by the Alvars or Vaishnavite saints. They are either dedicated to Vishnu or Siva. *Kanya Kumari* (Cape Comorin), known also as *Adisetu*, is at the southern end of India, and is as sacred as Benares and Rameswaram. Sahadeva and Balarâma are believed to have offered worship there. It is recorded, in *Manimekhalai*, the great Tamil classic, that *Kanya Kumari* was a famous place of pilgrimage in the early centuries of the Christian era. Suchindrum, the famous temple of *Sthanumalaya* in South Travancore, is rich in epigraphic wealth. It was here that Indra was purified, as is evident from the name *Suchindrum* itself, of the unpleasant consequences of a self-

invited curse. The Adi Kesava Perumal temple, at Thiruvattar, is also one of great antiquity, and with its large corridors, adorned with rows of stone pillars, and excellent sculpture works on them, forms a magnificent piece of ancient Dravidian architecture.

And again who has not heard of the famous temple of Janardhanam at Varkalai, which attracts, throughout the year, pilgrims from North India in large numbers? Sabarimalai, ensconced amidst primeval forests, high up in the Ghats, is the most popular temple of Sasta in South India. Kaladi, on the northern bank of the picturesque Periyar river, is wellknown as the birth-place of Sri Sankaracharya, the world-renowned expounder of *advaita-vedanta* philosophy.

But, the most outstanding and far-famed is the temple of Padmanabha (Ananta Sayanam), the tutelary deity of Travancore and her Royal House at Trivandrum. It is the richest religious institution in the State and is dedicated to Vishnu, the national deity worshipped by an overwhelming majority of Hindus. It displays great variety in structure, size and ornamentation, and attracts, at all seasons of the year, visitors and votaries from various parts of India. An attempt is made in the following chapters to deal with the origin of this temple, its antiquity, festivals, architecture, paintings, etc.



## CHAPTER II

### The Temple

THE Padmanabhaswami temple is of hoary antiquity and stands on high ground facing east. The premises cover about seven acres measuring 570 ft.  $\times$  510 ft. A handsome flight of stone steps leads up to the entrance door leading to the temple, which is a massive one surmounted by a great stone tower. This is the pagoda, and stands not over the most sacred part of the temple, but above the entrance gateway. The tower is covered with elaborate sculpture and ornamental work, and has window-like openings in the centre of each of its seven storeys. These openings, as well as the face of the tower, are lighted every evening, and the illumination is visible even from a great distance. Within is an extensive, well-swept courtyard, surrounded by open porticos supported on carved stone-pillars, which are covered with grotesque, or natural, representations of Gods, warriors and animals.

The line of golden *stupis* (domes) tapering to a point on the platform on the top of the gopuram, adds majesty to the figure and stirs up the imagination of the tourist and pilgrim. The figures of the deities on the gopuram reveal the wonderful conception and outlook of the craftsmen "whose art bears comparison only with the great art of Greek and Roman sculptors who created petrified music dominated by sculptural rhythm." The sculptured gopurams of the temples at Trivandrum and Suchindrum are impressive specimens of the Dravidian style of architecture, and betoken a happy blend of the Kerala and Tamil cultures.

The pagoda measures about a 100 ft. high. But, as it strikes the eye, it is somewhat dwarfish for the width. The explanation possibly is that it was intended to be a gopuram of the highest class with 11 stages, or at least nine, in which case the height would be just about half as much again or even a little more. If the full size had been given to it the seeming disproportion would vanish and it would have been one of the most impressive of South Indian gopurams. Probably, as Dr Krishnaswami Ayyangar suggests, considerations such as the danger of the structure falling from wind and weather stopped the plan from being carried out to the full.

The temple itself encloses the big square with a high protecting wall which can be used as a fortress. As a matter of fact, these larger temples of Southern India do serve the purpose of protected fortification on occasions of emergency. In olden days, under the simpler systems of warfare and weapons then known, they yielded an effective and strong protection from enemies.

As soon as one gets inside the gopuram there is a corridor, rectangular in shape, constructed round the main temple. It is called *Sivelimantapam*. It has an attractive appearance and is intended for the procession path of the God. It is 450 ft. in length, the shorter side being 350 ft. It is 25 ft. broad and 18 ft. high. The total number of pillars supporting the structure is 324. The surface area is nearly 3 acres and 14 cents. The stone ceiling above and the two rows of granite pillars have been made the receptacle of the talents of the sculptor's chisel. The figure of a girl bearing a lamp in the

palm of her hands joined together, and brought above her abdomen, is seen in every stone pillar. The top of the pillar is capped by the head of a unicorn. And in its mouth is seen a ball of stone as if rolling.

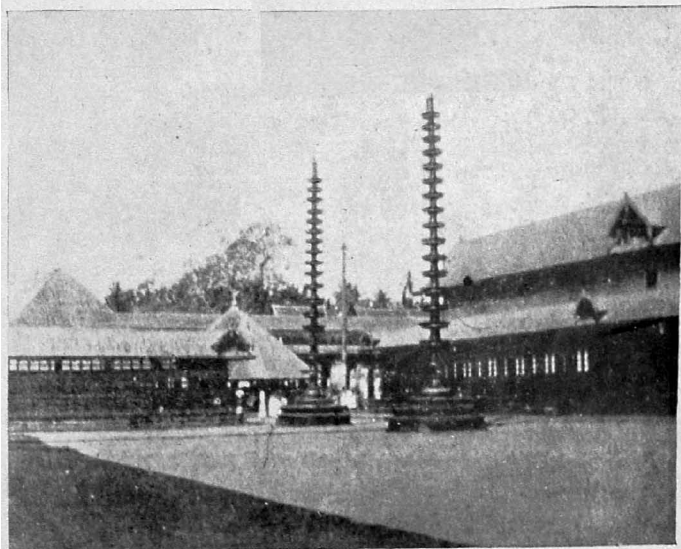
At a height of 10 feet from the floor is suspended a fine brass lamp on each side of the pillar. Rows of iron lamps, of the same height as the hanging brass lamps, are also placed between the stone pillars. The niches of the lamps will hold about two to four ounces of oil which would keep them burning for three or four hours at night. When these, and the lamps on the outer walls of the inner shrine, are lighted, the whole place presents a magnificent and impressive sight.

During festivals, the *Sivelimantapam* is used also for the feasting of about 3,000 Brahmins, and it has hardly any parallel in India, excepting perhaps in the dining halls in Tripunitura, in Cochin State.

There are four raised pavilions at the four corners of this great procession path, but not connected with it. These are named *Oonchamantapams*. On ordinary days, they are generally resorted to by people for the reading of the puranas, or for the dramatic performance of the famous Chakyars of Malabar, or for Veda-chanting parties. During festivals, when the courtyard and the *Sivelimantapam* are crowded with people, women and children resort to this place and witness the God's procession. South of this is a building set apart specially for purposes of State ceremonies, and on the north is the uncommonly big and

commodious kitchen, commensurate in size and area to the needs of those daily fed. It is provided with everything that would be necessary for cooking for 6,000 people dining at a time. Passing the kitchen, one comes to the *Dvajastamba* (flag-staff), "the emblem of victory," a *sine qua non* to every Hindu temple, regarded so by the immemorial usage of Hindus and by their sacred books. It is circular in shape, tapering towards the top. It is one log of teak wood and measures 18 ft. high without a flaw. Protected by a number of copper rings plated, it carries on the top a large figure of Garuda, said to be the *vahanam* (conveyance) of the God. The pewter image of Garuda and the copper plates are on the outside thickly gilded with gold in a manner peculiar to the artisans of the State. On occasions of festivals, this post carries the crimson flag. South of this flag-staff, and connected with the terraced roof of the *Siveli-mantapam*, is the wellknown *Kulasekaramantapam*, another huge stone pavilion, a real work of art, composed of sculptured stone showing very beautiful and intricate stone work. This mantapam corresponds to the thousand-pillared mantapams in other great shrines, and is also sometimes called *ayirakkalmantapam*.

From the *dwajastamba* to the temple is another entrance vestibule (hall). It is called in this temple *Velikkapurai*; from there one has to go beginning from the *Balipitum* (sacrificial stone) through the long pathway through the roofed hall to reach the sanctum of the temple, the front yard of the inner shrine. The inner yard of the shrine is reached by another flight of steps. No worshipper, except the officiating Nambudiri priests, is allowed



The interior of the temple viewed from within its western entrance, showing the columns of lights bearing circular troughs of oil with wick-groves on all sides, the gabled roofing, the flag-staff, etc.

to enter the shrine. The inner shrine itself is a room wide enough to be provided with three doors. The head, the heart, and the feet of the God have to be worshipped. And the three doors are in front of these parts. Worshippers have to stand on a pavilion raised about four feet from the ground. It measures about 20 ft.  $\times$  25 ft. and is called *Ottakalmantapam*, the pavilion of a single stone. But really this is called *Purascharnamantapam* where the worshipper is supposed to do the preliminary ceremonies necessary for approaching the spiritual presence. According to authoritative canons of temple-worship, "one has to perform mentally various operations by means of which he sheds his physical body and carries himself only in spirit in approaching the spiritual presence of the deity."

In Malabar temples this kind of pavilion seems a feature of peculiar importance and interest. In the Tiruvadi temple, in South Arcot, we have reference to the provision of such a mantapam by a Travancore ruler, Ravi Varman Kulasekara.

The shrine itself contains a very large image of Vishnu in the lying posture abed on the great serpent, *sesha*, "in the ocean of milk before the process of creation." Outside this inner shrine, but within the enclosure itself, there are other small shrines dedicated to Krishna, Sasta, Narasimha, Ganesa, etc. The walls around this shrine are covered with paintings of stories from the Puranas.

The temple has a Government of its own. Formerly, the management was vested in a

committee known as *Ettarayogam*. It was composed of seven Brahmin jenmis, one Nayar chieftain, and the ruling Maharaja who, at that time, exercised only half a vote, while the other eight members had one vote each. This means that ordinarily the Maharaja did not interfere in the management, "but contented himself with a controlling voice when public interests required."

The final authority in the management of the temple now vests in His Highness the Maharaja. There is a body which consists of one *sanyasi*, six Potti Brahmins, and one Nayar nobleman (possessing with others a single vote) who constitute the honorary trustees. The Maharaja appoints certain officers also. The officer on the spot is the Mathilakam Karyakkar, and the Sarvadhi Karyakkar, of the Maharaja's palace, is the Controlling officer.

The lands belonging to the temple bring in a large income which is utilised for the maintenance of the institution, the performance of daily services, occasional ceremonies and festivals. Payments are also made towards the expenses of the temple from the State Treasury.

## CHAPTER III

### Stories of Origin

THE stories connected with the origin of the Padmanabhaswami temple, in the veracity of which all orthodox Hindus believe, are of fascinating interest.

What is now Trivandrum was formerly a big and dense forest called *Ananthankadu*, with a few inhabitants. Here, a story says, dwelt a Pulayan and his wife, who obtained their livelihood by cultivation. One day, as they were weeding their grounds, the Pulayan's wife heard the weeping of a babe. She rushed to the spot from where the cry came and found, to her surprise, a small child weeping disconsolately. The child was exceedingly handsome, and seemed too fair to be a human child. At any rate, thus it struck the Pulaya woman; and she would not touch it. But the continued cries of the babe made the woman in her get the better of her deference. Purifying herself, she took the child, fondled him and gave milk from her breast.

On being caressed in this manner, the child became jubilant and began to play about. The Pulaya woman left him under the shade of a tree and resumed her work in the paddy field. After a while, she returned to see a big five-headed cobra playing merrily with the child, whom it afterwards carried away in its hood and placed inside the hollow of a tree near-by, which gave him



shelter from sun and rain. The appearance of the snake connoted to her the divine origin of the child. The Pulaya and his wife were eye-witnesses to this scene and they used to worship every day the five-headed serpent and the child, offering them milk and *conjee* in a coconut shell, when, one day, information reached the then Maharaja of Travancore, who, at once, ordered the erection of a temple at this site because a cobra is always associated with Vishnu as his favourite. He also ordered the dedication of the temple to God Padmanabha.

According to another legend, the temple was built by an ascetic of Malabar, named Vilvaman-galam Swamiyar, "the devotee *par excellence* of Sri Krishna, whose name as a saint and poet had spread throughout the length and breadth of India." It would appear that this pious man used to worship Vishnu to attain salvation in the usual elaborate form, by his daily pujas to the Sala-gramoms.\* While engaged in worship, he used to close his eyes, as worshippers usually do, and get through the many acts of worship. Highly pleased with him, Vishnu, in the guise of a small baby, appeared before him one day during the puja hour. The sage was full of joy on seeing the baby, and

\* Salagramoms are sacred stones representing the incarnation of Vishnu. They are small, fossilised, mollusc-like stone conch-shells and are gathered from the river Gandake near Benares.

Mr P. G. Shaw remarks that Salagrama is one of the five Gods (*Panchayatna*) whose worship as a group was initiated by the great Sankaracharya, evidently with the object of uniting the various Hindu sects against Hinduism.

The Salagrama worship is eminently the fruit of Hindu religious life, and it was during the Puranic period that it came into prominence

prayed that its *darshan* be daily granted to him. The child, Vishnu in reality, promised to do so, on condition that he would go away if he (the sage) behaved rashly. During the days that followed, the child's pranks increased. The articles of worship arranged in front of the Swamiyar used to be thrown about indiscriminately, and set aside, from day to day. The Swamiyar would not interrupt his worship by opening his eyes.

One day the child polluted the Salagrama, which had been only then washed, dressed, and anointed with sandal. The Swamiyar soon lost his patience and shoved aside the meddling child with the back of his hand, while yet continuing his worship with closed eyes. The child at once told him that he had violated his promise, that he was no other than the deity whom he had been worshipping for long, so strenuously and single-mindedly.

The Swamiyar opened his eyes. But alas! the child had disappeared saying that he (the Swamiyar) could not meet him unless he went to *Ananthankadu*, which then was a thick jungle but where the temple now majestically stands. This set the Swamiyar thinking that he had made a great mistake in driving the child away. He got perplexed and said to himself: "I have been performing the puja and chanting prayers for several years to see Vishnu in reality. He now did come before me and blessed me with his august presence and I have failed to take advantage of it. Now that he has gone from this place, I do not know where I shall be able to meet him. Moreover, I have been told that if I should get his

darsan, I should go to *Ananthankadu*. I do not know where it is."

The Swamiyar left his seat in a perturbed mind and began his wanderings. Now and then he heard the distant jingling of the baby's waist ornament and, without even waiting to satisfy his appetite, ran with great speed. Not knowing where *Ananthankadu* was, the sage wandered through interminable forests and hilly places, till at last he rested despairingly at a place the whereabouts of which he was absolutely ignorant. In remorse and repentance he was brooding over what had happened, when he heard a human voice giving expression to the following angrily: "If you persist in crying like this, I'll throw you in *Ananthankadu*." The dejected Swamiyar's hopes revived at once and he set about inquiring as to whence the voice came. Advancing a little, he saw a Pulaya woman with a child. She told him, on inquiry, that the child persisted in crying and that she had threatened it saying she would throw it away into *Ananthankadu*.

Thus knowing where the place was, he proceeded into the dense forest. Before he went very far, he heard again the jingling bells of the baby and went near an old *Iluppa* tree (*Bassia longifolia*), wherefrom the sound seemed to originate. The Swamiyar resumed his puja in this jungle and gained the object of his weary perigrinations. For, the tree fell and split into two, and, wonder of wonders, he saw within Vishnu lying on Adishesha, in the full form of Ananthasayana. "With all his four arms in splendour and serenity, extending from Tiruvallam

(four miles to the south of Trivandrum) to Tiruppur (eight miles to the north of Trivandrum) with his middle portion at *Tiru-Anandapuram* (modern Trivandrum), Vishnu was lying on Adishesha."

The Swamiyar felt immensely pleased and continued his pujas in accordance with his daily routine, but he soon found that he could not conduct his pujas and circumambulations, as the God was extending over a vast area. So he prayed for the deity's contraction, and in response to that prayer the deity shrank to comparatively small dimensions. A shrine was built there and worship performed to the deity. To perform the *nivedyam*, the Swamiyar then got only some pickled mangoes and a coconut shell. It is a fact that even today this shell, though covered with gold, is used as the offering vessel, and amidst the other accepted offerings pickled mango plays a prominent part. Anyone who visits the temple at about 10 or 11 a.m. can witness this. When the Swamiyar constructed a small shrine, he set up an image of the deity which is believed to be the present image of Padmanabha.

## CHAPTER IV

### Antiquity

EARLY in the eighteenth century, His Highness Marthanda Varma rebuilt the Padmanabha temple with its present spacious verandas, tall towers, the stone architecture and other excellent adjuncts, which have won the admiration of modern engineering and sculpture. During the reign of that ruler, the idol of Padmanabha, which is in a reclining posture, was sanctified by being filled with Salagramoms\*, because the Hindu belief is that the worship of a single Salagramom would give him beatitude, and so when a number of them is propitiated, it would engender heavenly happiness.

No one knows exactly when the pagoda was built, but the *Brahmapurana* mentions the temple in Trivandrum. As in the case of many other renowned temples in South India, the Padmanabha temple should have undergone also renewals, repairs, and extensions, from time to time, so that it cannot be located in point of time to any particular period. In fact it bears evidence of greater antiquity than may be made out by the outer constructions.

There are a few references to the temple in the literature of the Sangam period which covered the first three centuries of the Christian era. In

\* Mr Sankunny Menon says in his *History of Travancore* that 12,000 Salagramoms were used for making the image.

the *Padirupattu*\*, a Sangam work which depicts eloquently the strength and skill of ancient Chera rulers, it is said that the place was a forest region and that the temple itself was in the depths of a forest. It is also said that the shrine is on the sea-shore in a quiet secluded place. A crowd of pilgrims came to worship this deity from great distances. They all bathed in the tank, and waited starving to offer worship to the deity; having performed the ceremony, they returned to their places.

The ruler for the time, it is said in the poem, saw to the safety of these people and the security of their property during their dreary journey through the hills and dales. This Chera ruler is said to be known by the name "The Chera of the fibre crown and garland of kalankai (Carissa berry)." The poet who celebrated this great ruler is called Kappiyanar of Kappiaru. It is recorded that this Chera ruler belonged to a period of South Indian history reaching down to the commencement of the Christian era. Dr S. Krishnaswami Ayyangar says that some of these early Chera monarchs, in fact many of them, were worshippers of Vishnu, and even those whose personal predilections were for Siva did show great regard for this deity. A successor of his, whom the

\* The *Padirupattu* (the Ten Tens) is an anthology of enormous importance. Here we are introduced to a number of Kings in the Chera dynasty, with a splendid record of their deeds and achievements, thus enabling us to get at a true picture of the political conditions of the Tamil land about 2,000 years ago. Neither the compiler nor the patron of the work is known to us.

famous poet Kapilar celebrated, the Chera Selvakkadungo, is also recorded to have been devoted much to Vishnu, but, of course, there is nothing to indicate that it is the temple at Trivandrum that is under reference.

Mr S. Sanku Ayyar, however, says that the passage, *Kamal Kararrulai alankar selvan chevadi paravi*, in the fourth decad of the above work, relates to the attitude of the worshippers of a Vishnu temple in the Chera country. The term *selvan* in it is explained, he says, by the old commentator of this passage, whose date and identity are unknown, as "*Tirumal of Tiru-Anandapuram*" that is Vishnu of Trivandrum.

Similarly, in the Sangam epic *Chilappadi-karam* there is a reference to the temple in the passage which describes the Benares expedition of the Chera King Senkuttuvan. It is mentioned that certain persons approached him, on the eve of his departure, with the *prasadam* of the "Lord reclining on the serpent-bed in *Adakamadam*." The word *Adakamadam*, in this passage, is explained by the commentator of *Chilappadikaram* as *Tiru-Anandapuram*, i.e., Trivandrum. From this passage, as well as from the reference in *Fadirupattu*, it is inferred that the temple existed in the Sangam period.

Another earliest classical work in Tamil which contains a somewhat reliable reference to the shrine, is the devotional song of Nam Alwar, the Vaishnavite saint. He calls Trivandrum *Tiru-Anandapuram* and describes Padmanabha as lying on the serpent bed. It is claimed that Nam Alwar

lived some time in the ninth century after Christ. The reference to the temple in the song is, therefore, an authority that the temple existed in the ninth century A.D.

There is a reference to Trivandrum and the temple in the *Varahapurana*. Here Vishnu expresses himself thus :

“Syanandureti vikhyatam  
Bhumeh Guhyam Padam mama  
Uttaretu Samudrasya  
Malayasyatu dakshine.”

It is rather difficult to prove when exactly this work was composed. Some scholars assign it to the sixth century after Christ.

Regarding the inscriptions recorded in the temple, it may be said that they supply us only with dates for the several charities made, or some such thing; and occasionally also for the construction of certain *mantapas* put up subsequently. From the inscriptions on the back of the vestibule in front of the *Ottakalmantapam*, it is evident that His Highness Martanda Varma, resolving to rebuild the temple, summoned the Brahmin architect Bala Kanthara (Thaikattu Bhattathiri) and ordered him to renovate the temple from *vimana* (Sreekoil) to *Dipasala* (Vilakkumadom). The work was started on 29th *Ani*, 904 M.E. (1778 A.D.) and, in course of time, the central shrine, the *Ottakalmantapam*, the *Mahamantapam*, the *Digmantapam*, the *Dipasala*, the *Alankaramantapam* and the *Ardhamantapam* were finished. The images of Padmanabha,



Lekshmi, Bhoomi, the *parivaras* and the serpent-bed were then made. Finally, on 3rd *Panguni* 908 M.E. (1782 A.D.), it is stated, the *Kumbhanyasa* ceremony was celebrated.

The inscriptions, therefore, give us no clue as to the origin of the main shrine. This is always the case with the majority of South Indian temples and the reason for omitting such an important piece of information is apparent. Every temple has necessarily to recognise as almost a tenet of Hinduism that the Gods worshipped within are "ancient" (*Purana-Dampati*). There is also a common saying that the origin of Gods, saints and rivers ought not to be gone into; for the inquiry may often lead to undesirable conclusions; the temple may happen to be a tomb originally; a saint may be but a miserable man of low birth, and a sacred river at its source may be only a dirty little pool. Consequently, to secure great antiquity to the God, people purposely avoid giving the date of consecration of the temples.

## CHAPTER V

### Daily Pujas

THE temple is the personal dwelling place of the God, who lives there in human fashion, in a statue or symbol. The priest's function is to provide for the needs of the God's daily life, to work him with music, bathe him, make offerings for his meals, and pleasure him in all sorts of ways, mainly by reciting hymns in praise of him.

The daily services in a temple consist of prayers and offerings three times a day (*Trikkal puja*). The puja-performer is called Nambi-potti, and scrupulous observance of personal purity and cleanliness is expected of him. In former days, the accidental entry of a man lower than the status of a Sudra inside the temples required *punyaham* (purification), and that into the temple of Padmanabha a very expensive one. Since the Temple-Entry proclamation issued in 1936 by the Maharaja of Travancore, these disabilities, however, have disappeared in the State. The Ezhavas and others can now enter the temples and receive *prasadoms*.

All important temples have their head-priests (*Melsantis*) and assistants (*Kizhsantis*) to perform the daily pujas.

The Padmanabha temple has, as its functionaries, two Sanyasins (representatives of Vilvaman-gala Matom), one Thantri, and four Nambis or arch-priests (two for Sri Padmanabha's puja and one each for Narasimha's and Krishna's). The morning

puja is known as *Usha puja*. At 4 a.m. the doors of the inner shrine are opened and the Nambi-potti enters with his assistants. There is a preliminary purification ceremony which consists in the sprinkling of water, with *mantrams*, over the *Ottakalmantapam*. To the loud booming notes of the conch-shell, the doors of the *sanctum-sanctorum*, in which the God resides, are then opened by the Nambi-potti. The floor round the image is then sprinkled with *panchagavyam*, the symbol of purification. The flowers used for worship the previous night are removed and the image of the God (the image in the standing posture to which the daily puja is performed, the other one, with *Adisesha* for bed, being too big to be handled) is taken out for abishekam. The deity is then offered a *nivedyam* of fried rice, dried coconuts, and plantains. Lighted camphor is waved round several times before the image. The image is then placed in its usual place, and a *pushpanjili* (offering of *tulsi* leaves) is conducted.

Sri Padmanabha is the tutelary deity of the ruling house of Travancore. The Maharajas have assumed the title of *Sri Padmanabhadasa* (servant of the deity) ever since 1750 A.D., when the then ruler dedicated his possessions to the deity and took over the cares of the State as the viceroy of the Lord. His Highness Sri Chitra Thirunal Maharaja, the present ruler, visits the temple for worship daily between 8-30 and 9-30 a.m.

At 11 a.m. the forenoon puja begins and the procedure consists in washing the image and adorning it with flowers, waving of lights and camphor, and offering *nivedyam* which consists of

cooked rice, sweet porridge, *appam* (sweet cakes), tender coconuts, salted mangoes, betel, nuts and spices. Earlier, the small image (representative of the deity) is carried thrice round the temple, to the accompaniment of temple music, by the assistant *Santikar* on his head. *Sribhutaveli* is given to the lesser divinities during the procession. The day-time worship ends with this puja, and there is a perfect lull for the next four hours.

The evening puja begins only at 6, or a little earlier, and consists of the *Attazha puja* and the *Ardhayama puja*. The former is one of the most important occasions for worship. The image of the God is then decorated with cloths, jewels, sandal, and flowers. The inner shrine is well lighted and people muster in hundreds for the *Deeparadhana*, when a plate of burning camphor is waved in front of the God to the accompaniment of *mantras*, music of the pipe, and ringing of innumerable bells. *Prasadom* consisting of flowers and sandal are given to the assembled worshippers. After this there is the *Ardhayama puja*, the course of worship being the same. The *nivedyam* consists of fried rice, sweetened beaten rice, *aravannai* (rice, sugar and ghee boiled together), *appam*, honey, plantains, and betel and nuts.

### **Worship and Worshippers**

Belief in God is ingrained in man, and those who visit the temple bow very respectfully from the *Balipeetom* directly in front of the God. They perambulate the innermost gallery of the sanctuary, muttering prayers all the time, making their *sombaie* or reverence (a gesture performed by

bending forward and striking the forehead with clasped hands), each time they come opposite the door of the God. They sing *slokams* (verses) in praise of the deity during the *Deeparadhana*. The consecrated water after the God's bathing, and the flowers cast off from his person after the day's use are considered as of great virtue and distributed to the worshippers who drink the sacred *tirtham* and wear the flowers on their own persons.

On the outer walls of the main shrine are represented scenically portions of the Puranas like the marriage of Sita, the wars of Rama and Ravana, Pandavas and Kauravas. The devout worshipper looks at them reverentially, and touches his eyes with the fingers consecrated by a touch of the holy walls on which these beautiful and interesting scenes are painted.

At about 10 p.m. the daily round of pujas comes to a close. The priests and servants leave the shrine. The Nambi-potti is led by a servant with a portable metal lamp (*kodivilakku*) which is an emblem of his status and dignity.

The Padmanabhaswami temple is a centre of attraction to the old and the young, by its perfect system of worship, by the piety and peace it breathes and the regularity in the performance of the daily pujas. Viewed from the standpoint of its religious importance, its architectural beauty, the feeling which it generates in the human mind, or the active beneficence which it dispenses, it is alike useful and instructive.

## CHAPTER VI

### Festivals

EVERY temple has its own characteristic festivals celebrated once or twice every year. In the Padmanabhaswami temple, there are two festivals, one celebrated in *Pankuni* (April) and the other in *Alpasi* (November). They last for 10 days each. On the first day is the *kodiyettu*, hoisting of the sacred flag, and on the last day the *Arat* or bathing festival followed by the *kodiyirakku*, unfurling of the flag. They are attended with elaborate ceremonials and these occasions draw cheerful crowds of men, women and children, dressed in their best, from the neighbouring villages and towns.

Every day, both in the evening and at night, the images of the Gods are taken in procession around the *Sivelimantapam*, with a display of various musical instruments, with all the accompaniments of native processions such as decorations of the Gods, music, perfume, sweet odours, lights, songs, gold and silver umbrellas, elephants, horses and bulls. This procession is known as *Siveli*. At night, the procession is picturesque because there is the additional attraction of the temple being well illuminated. The Maharaja walks in front, before the *vahanams*, in temple costume. Prominent Hindu officials also take part in the procession.

When the festival is on, enthusiastic crowds of men, women and children assemble in the evenings in the wide avenue leading to the temple, for many an amusement is provided for the sight-seer.

Here one sees a *thullal* (jumping) actor and his accompanists reciting some interesting story from the great epics and holding the audience spellbound, there a rope-dancer performing his breath-taking feats, and in a third place an expert sword-player doing his best to outwit his rivals.

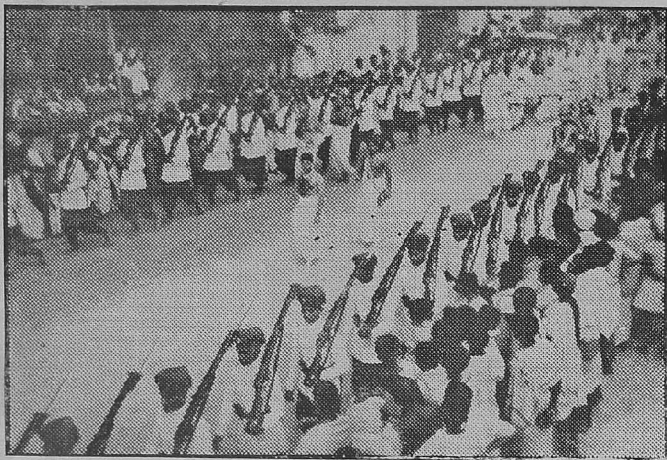
But more than all these, it is the Velakali, a unique war dance, which recalls the martial valour of the Nayar fighters of old. It is performed in front of the flight of steps leading to the gopuram during the *Pankuni* (April) festival. The great battle of Kurukshetra forms the background of this dance which takes place late in the evening and again at night. For about an hour the actors enact the part of the Kaurava host before fleeing pell-mell up the temple steps in token of final defeat.

The make-up of the Velakali actors seems a picturesque survival of the battle dress of the fighters of ancient Kerala. They wear a white loin cloth reaching down to the knee, and over it a scarlet piece of cloth, spankled with glittering silver knobs and dots, hanging in front from the waist. The whole is held in position by a white strip of cloth tied in the manner of a belt. The bare chests are adorned with strings of many-coloured beads, shells, and glass pieces. The head-dress of red cloth, bordered with gold or silver

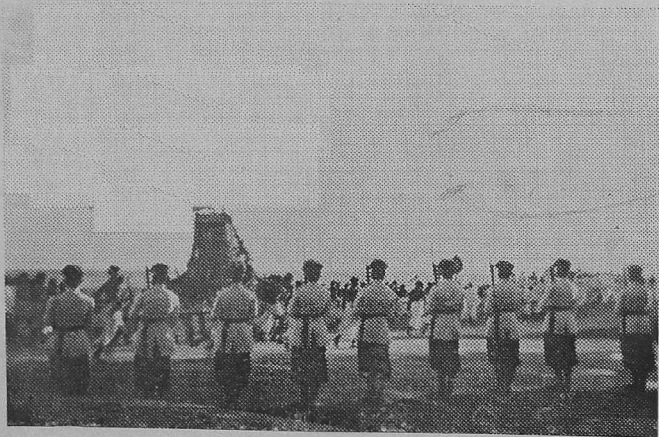


Velakali : The great battle of Kurukshetra forms the background of this dance performed during the festival.





**Arat procession :** The Maharaja, sword in hand, conducting the whole procession as God Padmanabha's first servant attended by Ministers and other officers.



The images of the Gods are taken to the sea in kingly state.

lace, has an elongated knot at the left. The actors carry small sword-like sticks and ornamented shields.

At the call of the trumpet, the actors take up their positions at the foot of the steps in front of the temple. They belong to an ancient Nayar family, and are not divided into opposing parties; they take one side only, the side of the defeated Kauravas.

Their opponents, the Pandavas, are represented by giant figures, carved in wood, dressed in red, and endowed with prominent eyes, abundant hair and long finger nails. These images are from 20 to 30 feet in height and are placed on either side of the road leading to the temple. Yudhistira, known as the incarnation of righteousness and the eldest of the five, is seated, while the other four brothers stand, Bhima with his formidable mace balanced lightly on his shoulder, and Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva holding smaller clubs.

The actors, having taken their stand before the Pandava images, display their acrobatic skill, both individually and collectively, to the beat of drums and the sounding of bugles. They then make massed attacks, and advance or retreat as the fortunes of the conflict hold sway. For nearly an hour the fight thus goes on, when, exhausted by their own unavailing malice, they flee in disorder up the temple steps, leaving the field to the victorious and silent Pandavas, "and the not so silent crowd of spectators of the symbolical spectacle presented through the art of the dance."

The people are thus entertained with dramatic performances of various kinds, which are peculiar to Malabar, feats of jugglery and skill, and other exhibitions within and near the sacred enclosure.

### **The Royal Hunt**

On the night of the ninth day of the festival there is a procession called *Pallivettai* (Royal Hunt) to a place a furlong outside the temple. According to tradition, Vishnu, as the protector of the Universe, is said to have set out to hunt and destroy a demon of destructiveness, "the old and ever new opposition of good and evil in one of its representations." The procession simulates the success of Vishnu to the point when he runs the demon to earth in a forest.

The climax of the above myth takes place on or near the spot, in front of the Sundaravilasom Palace in the Trivandrum Fort. In the distant past, the place was a thick jungle infested by wild animals. It is recorded that, 200 years ago, an attack, happily unsuccessful, was made here on the life of H.H. Marthanda Varma. A pile of shrubbery, at the junction of the three roads, represents the forest. At the foot of the pile, a coconut symbolises the hiding demon. The hunt takes place at about 8 p.m. At this time, the approach of the flickering high-held torches tells of the coming of the deity on his redemptive mission. Strict silence is observed, by the participators and spectators alike, to keep up the appearance of the mock-hunt. "There is no music, no conversation, nothing that would raise the suspicion of the demon whose hiding-place had been discovered.

Organised rhythmical movement in semi-darkness takes on an acute impressiveness in silence as the religious, civil and military units of the procession, all on quite bare feet on white sand, move almost ghostly to their places, watched by dimly seen rows of faces of spectators over neighbouring walls."

The slim figure of the Maharaja, now officiating as *Sri Padmanabhadusa*, accompanied by his brother, emerges as the chief archer of the hunt in the space in front of the forest. Behind him loom three dexterously decorated palanquins carried shoulder-high from the temple. One of these bears an image of Vishnu with bow and arrow, and it is flanked by images of Krishna and Narasimha. The tense regal figure in bare body and long loin cloth, standing out lonely, "the executant of the Divine Will", receives a bow and arrow from a priest in exchange temporarily for the State sword which he has carried away from the temple. After a moment's adjustment, he shoots the arrow into the hiding place of the demon. Evil has now been destroyed. The procession returns in triumph to the temple amidst great music, tom-tom, and the deafening noise of the infantry band, signifying a successful hunt.

The image of Vishnu cannot yet be returned to its place of sacredness inside the temple. It should necessarily remain outside the sanctuary, on a couch encompassed by foliage symbolizing part of the forest of the hunt, until he can be given a purificatory bath the next day. Though a representation of the deity, the image has, by the hunt, experienced pollution, and cannot, until it is

purified, resume its deific position. As Dr Cousins has remarked, "Good, in overcoming evil, has, in the nature of things to descend to the plane of evil, and in doing so suffers defilement. Its duty done, it must strenuously rid itself of the tendencies and stains that it has taken from its contact with evil. On this universal psychological law, so applicable to human action, particularly in peace following war, a law theologised and dramatised in the Vettai procession at the level of Deify, rests the necessity of the Arat procession on the day following the Vettai."

## CHAPTER VII

### The Arat Procession

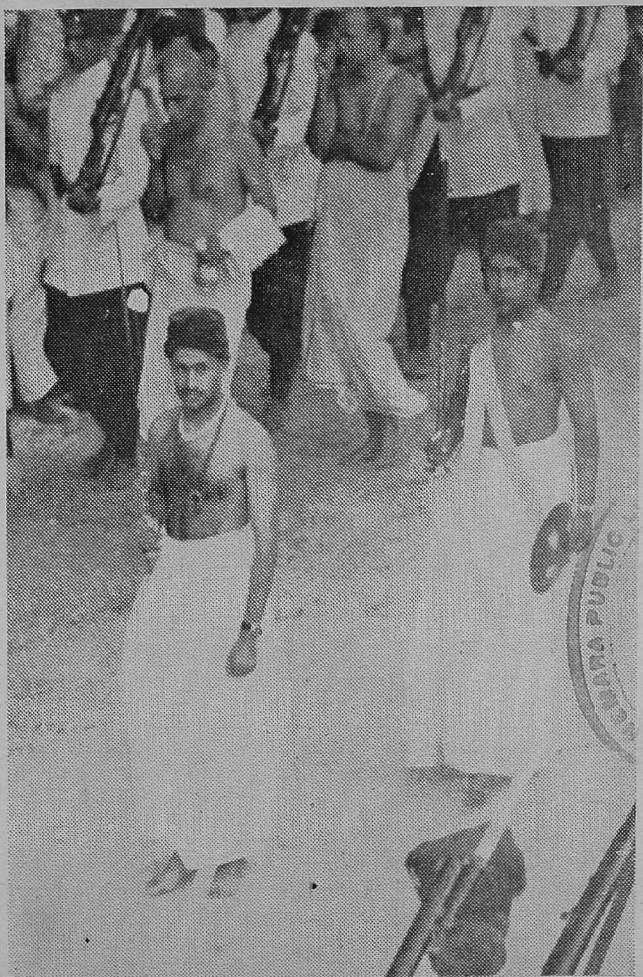
THE Arat procession is a unique function of unforgettable religious importance. It is impressively striking for its stately magnificence and brilliance. It is artistic, aesthetical and symbolic, and is a harmonious commingling of form, design, colour, sound and pageantry. The entire attractive paraphernalia of the temple is there in all its charming beauty and picturesqueness.

The three-mile road from the temple to the sea is previously strewn with fine white sand. On either side of this road, *en fete* with decorations of every kind, assemble thousands of people, from neighbouring places, dressed in their gayest and best, to witness the procession and pay homage to the Ruler out of their abundance of love and respect. Each and every visitor is lost for the time being, in solemn, undisguised admiration of the gorgeous grandeur spread before him. One can find a transparent veil of joy covering every face.

At 5 p.m. the cannon booms and the procession starts from the western gate of the temple. It is led by a majestic tusker gorgeously caparisoned and decked up in frontlets of gold carrying the State flag. The well-kept riderless Palace horses, merry in their artistic decorations, come next. On either side of the road marches the cavalry looking wonderfully smart, brilliant and attractive. Next comes the infantry in coloured uniforms marching

smartly with swinging arms. The Maharaja marches on foot, dressed in the native uniform and wearing a handsome velvet cap embroidered with a representation of the golden foot of Padmanabha. He carries a drawn sword in his hand and, accompanied by his brother, the Elaya Raja, precedes the images as their servant and guardian. The prominent Nayar officers of the State, in old-time costume of scarlet body-band and turban, plain skirt (*dhoti*) with sword and shield, descendants of the ancient protectors of the country, march before the Maharaja. The important Brahmin officers of the State also march behind His Highness, bare-headed and bare-footed, in temple costume. Behind them are the images of Padmanabha, Narasimha and Krishna (the first of gold and the others of silver), borne on the shoulders of Nambudiri priests surrounded by a crowd of other Brahmins, singing melodious songs, as an additional guard and security. Immediately ahead of the images there are also women servants of the temple, dressed in the old Kerala style, carrying in their hands lighted brass lamps. The procession moves on foot slowly, giving an occasion to the tremendous crowd of cheerful and energetic people for a leisurely look at His Highness and the images of the deities that follow. At every 50 or 100 yards, the procession halts, and the Maharaja turns round and makes a lowly obeisance to the Gods.

At sunset, this colourful procession reaches the sea. Preliminary worship is performed and offerings are made by the Maharaja at the adjoining temple. The images are then placed within temporary sheds erected for the purpose near-by, and



A close-up view of the Maharaja during the Arat procession. He is bare-footed  
• and bare-bodied, and behind him is his brother, the Elaya Raja.



prettily decorated in native style. Other prayers are chanted and garlands of flowers presented. The images are carried to the edge of the ocean, and are immersed thrice in the water, each immersion being followed by worship. But the waves, more powerful than the very images so highly honoured often strike down both priests and images, so that the latter are rescued only with considerable difficulty. The Maharaja also bathes in the sea. An illuminated procession escorts the purified images back to the temple; and the festival comes to a close with the unfurling of the flag. The crowds then melt away sending forth their prayers to the Almighty for a long life to H.H. the Maharaja.

In its great observances, the *Vettai* and the *Arat* processions, twice a year, "exalt the simple movement of walking from one place to another into an art-ritual by acting on the art principle that a spectacle without a spectator is a misnomer, and by unifying the mover-on and the looker-on in a symbolical significance that concerns both of them." These crucial observances aptly demonstrate two main phases of the art of symbolic spectacle, "the personal and the impersonal; that which is concerned with the life of an individual yet recognises a larger life; that which represents to eye and ear personages and events that are externally related to history (that which has happened) yet embody ideas that are external and surround every individual with their meaning."

The story symbolised in the two processions is not the only meaning of them. "They are,"

says Dr Cousins, "perhaps the most exoteric in symbolizing spectacularly the triumph of good over evil, the extirpation of that which obstructs the spiritual life, and the attainment of purification and peace through the destruction of the passions. But in a more profound interpretation, in which the temple is a representative of the Cosmos, such ceremonials, carried out through the art of symbolical spectacle, anticipate the final withdrawal of the external Universe into the being of Brahma."

## CHAPTER VIII

### Murajapom

BESIDES the *Vettai* and the *Arat*, there is the *Bhadradipam* (Prosperous lights) which is celebrated in January and July every year. It lasts for seven days each, and the ceremony of *Thirumudi Kalasam* is performed on the last day.

Another festival celebrated with great cost is the Murajapom (customary prayer) which is observed once in six years. It lasts for 56 days and culminates in the festival of *Lekshadipam* (a hundred thousand lights). The ceremony is considered greatly conducive to the defence of the State and the people, the procuring of a regular supply of rain, and also to the general prosperity of the State.

The origin of Murajapom goes back to the eventful days of the reign of H.H. Marthanda Varma who subjugated most of the petty principalities and gave the State its present territorial configuration. One day as he sat cogitating upon the famous victories he had achieved he felt sorry for the carnage of many people. To expiate the sins of war and conquest, and to ensure peace and prosperity for the State, he called forth a conference of learned men and teachers. On their advice, he immediately ordered the two half-yearly *Bhadradipam* ceremonies, and, when 12 such had been performed regularly, a Murajapom, with the feeding of a large number of Malayala Brahmins, the

original landlords of Kerala, and its culmination with a glorious illumination called *Lekshadipam* in the Padmanabhaswami temple.

The first Murajapom ceremony was observed in 1750 A.D. It was not only a religious expiation for the atonement of sins involved in the spilling of human blood, the conquering of less powerful neighbours and robbing them of their land and goods, it was also designed to atone for any imperfection, or sins of ignorance and omission, in the other religious observances. The last Murajapom was celebrated in 1947 and it was the 33rd of the series.

Preparations for the ceremony begin about a year ahead. The astrologer attached to the Palace fixes an auspicious day for the beginning of the ceremony. His Highness the Maharaja then issues a *neetu* (communication) to the Dewan ordering him to make necessary and immediate arrangements for the proper conduct of the festival. A few weeks prior to the commencement of the religious ceremony, writs of invitation are also issued from the Palace under the sign manual of His Highness to the two Vadhyans\*, the six Vaidikans, the Azhuvancheri Thampurakkal and the dignitaries of the Nambudiri Brahmins of Malabar. Writs of invitation are also extended to other prominent Nambudiris.

\* Ecclesiastical heads of the two *yogams* or groups into which the whole of the Nambudiri population of Kerala is divided. The State Manual edited by T. K. Velu Pillai says: "The Mathur Bhattathiri and the Ilayadathu Bhattathiri are generally commissioned to invite the Vadhyans on behalf of the Maharaja and these Bhattathiris start from Ampalapuzha in cabin boats with the usual escort to fetch them from Trichur and Thirunavai, the respective headquarters of the two Vadhyans."

On arrival in Trivandrum, they are received in typical oriental fashion with flutes and pipes playing melodiously, and to the tunes of the blowing of conch-shells. The guests are carried in palanquins or on the back of gaily caparisoned elephants followed by men carrying antique swords and bucklers. Every Nambudiri or other Malayala Brahmin is welcome to attend and take part in the ceremony; he is also sumptuously fed and honoured throughout the journey. All the guests are supplied with cots, bed-sheets, mattresses, blankets, vessels, and lamps for their use. Cloths are given for wearing, gratis. For their health and comfort all police and sanitary arrangements are also made.

The word *Murajapom* means a course of recitation or chanting of Vedic hymns, *mura* literally "a course of recitation" and *japom* meaning "prayer". The ceremonial consists of the following different kinds of *japoms* or chanting of *mantrams* to be gone through every day :

- (a) The *Murajapom* proper, or the recitation of the Vedas, takes place in the morning between 6 and 8 a.m. inside the temple. The Maharaja makes a *pradhakshinam* round the Vedic reciters while paying his customary worship to God Padmanabha. A course of recitation lasts for 8 days and there are seven such courses to be gone through.
- (b) The *Mantrajapom* takes place inside the temple along with the *Murajapom*.
- (c) The *Saharanamajapom* consists in repeating the thousand names of Vishnu and takes place inside the temple in the afternoon.
- (d) The *Jalajapom* takes place in the Padmathirtham tank, in front of the temple, in the evening. The Nambudiris recite the *mantrams* standing in knee-deep water. The object of this is to ensure the prosperity of the State and its protection from foreign enemies. It is also an invocation to God Varuna.

His Highness reverently inspects the body of reciters to see whether the religious ceremonies are performed in the best manner and in the most effective way.

The most interesting part of the Murajapom ceremony is the perfect smoothness and ease with which the gigantic business of feeding takes place in the Sivelippuras or corridors of the temple. It should be noted that the persons catered for number about 6,000, and that each and everyone of them is an honoured guest of the Maharaja. The feeding commences a little after 8 a.m. and continues till 1 p.m. The Thekkedathu Bhattathiri is a very important functionary inasmuch as he is the person who should start the feeding inside the temple, after taking the formal commands of the Maharaja. This privilege was conferred on him in recognition of the services rendered to the State by his ancestors in the war against Ampalapuzha.

Particular care is taken in the preparation of the various dishes, since the least irregularity may bring about consequences of a dire import. Some of the guests are fine connoisseurs of the various curries that are served daily. They appreciate the nice nuances in the preparation of the meal as it varies from day to day or from one Murajapom to another. Some of them go to the extent of carrying with them memories of the details of the dishes served 50 years ago. The story is still told of a Nambudiri who remarked during one Murajapom to a friend that the only item needed to make the Murajapom feast perfect was a mango preserved in a particular jar in a particular

Nambudiri's house. The then Maharaja, who was then moving about *incognito*, happened to overhear this and sent at once a secret messenger to bring a few of the famous mangoes, and had pieces of them served one night along with other tasty pickles. Nobody noticed anything particular about these mango-slices, but when the Nambudiri who had mentioned them earlier tasted a bit, he burst out with delight, "Ah, my friend, so you too have arrived. This indeed is a perfect feast." The Maharaja who was watching the whole scene was so pleased with the Nambudiri's sensitiveness of tongue that he sent for him and gave valuable presents.

After the *Sahasranamajapom* the Nambudiri guests are treated to a light tiffin. In the evening is the *Jalajapom* after which they repair to the temple for supper.

Special arrangements are made in the matter of amusements and recreation for the guests. They evince great interest in Pathakom, Koothu, reading of the Puranas and Kathakali. They also play chess, cards, etc. During the leisure hours they walk about the town much pleased with the attractions which the highly civilised capital affords, particularly the Zoo of the Public Gardens, some of the most innocent among them addressing caressing words to the tigers and bears in them.

The *Bhadradipam* feast commences on the 48th day of the Murajapom ceremony. Brahmins are then allowed to mess with the Nambudiris. The number daily fed during the last week of the

ceremony is about 10,000. *Sarvani* (money doles) is given to all Brahmins on the day following the *Lekshadipam*, and this concludes the ceremony. The guests then leave Trivandrum to their respective places.

This ancient ceremonial is full of meaning and interest. To those sympathetically inclined towards ancient institutions, "who not only look upon them with approbation but even veneration as marking the different stages in the political history of the State, but who nevertheless fear that as time goes on, these old-world symbols of a by-gone civilisation showing the earliest supremacy of the Eastern Aryan races in the land, will all fade away.





A LADY'S TOILET



SASTA ON HORSEBACK

## CHAPTER IX

### Distinctive Architecture

THE temples of Travancore are the main treasures of the art production of the State, and present a fascinating study in contrast between the simple Kerala and elaborate Dravidian styles of architecture. When Mahatma Gandhi visited the State, a few years ago, he remarked: "I had visited temples before in North India but I had not done so in a devout spirit, and they had failed to stir me. But the majestic Travancore temples spoke to me. Every carving, every little image, every little oil lamp, had a meaning for me."

The architecture of Travancore temples is very different from that of the rest of India. The circular central shrine, surmounted by a conical dome, the square hall in front of the shrine, and the quadrangular walk round these, the small hall in front of the temple accommodating in it the sacrificial altar, the triangular gables, and the dormer windows, are all characteristic of Travancore. In their gable roofs only do the Travancore temples have a distinctiveness of structure. In the typical Travancore temples, there is no difference in construction up to the entablature from the Dravidian style of architecture. The distinction becomes visible in the upper portion of the structure.

Two distinguishing characteristics of Travancore temples, from an artistic and architectural point of view, are their wood-carvings and their

peculiar gable style of architecture. Wood-carving is a speciality of Travancore, and many temples abound in some kind of wood-work or other of great beauty and delicacy. It is only natural, that in a richly forested country, wood-carving should have attained special popularity and excellence.

The Padmanabhaswami temple offers a fruitful field for study for the antiquarian. Built in the Dravidian style of architecture, it is a superb example of the wonderful work in stone by ancient India's artists. The gopuram is made of elaborate ornamental work, and the figures of the deities reveal the marvellous conception and outlook of the craftsmen who executed them. The elaborateness of the details, the boldness of execution, the conception of the motif, the delicacy of carving, and the calm dignity and simple grace that adorn the temple reflect the robust outlook of the master-minds of by-gone days who loved to worship art and beauty.

With its Dravidian gopuram, reflected in its ablution tank, it is striking not only by its combination of strength and beauty in the temple as a whole, but by special details such as the *Kulasekaramantapam* (assembly hall), with its perfect proportions and its fusion of architecture and sculpture. This fusion, according to Dr Cousins, it achieves in pillars that are at once structurally essential in support of the heavy stone roof, and artistically satisfying in their figures of deific beings and incidents related in the ancient Hindu scriptures. The rectangular hall, essentially Malabar in style, is a gallery of beautifully set

sculptured pillars and artistically worked iconographic specimens. Every visible part is fully adorned by carvings of Puranic stories, floral designs, etc. Made of granite from foundation to roofing, the mantapa is claimed to have been constructed by Bala Rama Varma Kulasekara, the immediate successor of Bala Martanda Varma of Travancore.

Of the original style of the temple, there is no record extant, but it became a typical Dravidian structure in the hands of restorers from the great temple centres of South India. We find that the structure consists of the magnificently ornamented *vimana* above the main shrine (Sreekoil) which is oblong in shape and is surrounded by a pyramidal roof having two storeys and which contains the *garbagraha* or cell in which the image of the God is kept. In front of the central shrine is situated the *Namaskaramantapam*, square in shape and built with a pyramidal roof. Its massiveness testifies to the fine concept of form and the masterly skill in craftsmanship which the sculptors of an age of temple-building activity had in handling such heavy masses.

The path for the *pradhakshina* is between the wall of the inner cell and the outer wall. The porches of the *mantapas*, which are generally larger than the *vimanas*, cover always and precede the gateway leading to the cell. Surrounding the *vimanas* and the *mantapas* are the *gopurams* containing carvings of several deities and mythological persons. In the *gopurams* and the *vimanas* of the several temple structures can be traced one distinct characteristic of the different styles of

temple architecture. In the North Indian temples which extend from the Himalayas to the River Krishna, the *vimanas* are much characterised by the predominance of their vertical over the horizontal lines.

Thus the principal features of the temple are :

- (a) The cell or the chamber, the holy place of the main deity, with a *vimana* over it ;
- (b) Mantapa in front of the cell (Sreekoil) ;
- (c) Corridors or pillared halls used for several purposes ;
- (d) Outer enclosure with *gopurams* or towers ;
- (e) *Sivelipuras* or broad corridors between the gateway and the inner shrine ;
- (f) Shrines dedicated to minor gods within the first outer enclosure ; and
- (g) *Dwajasthamba* or flagstaff.

The Padmanabhaswami temple occupies a vast area and excels other temples in its generous lay-out, carved pillars, commodious passages, and assemblages of gabled roofs.



RAJARAJESWARI

## CHAPTER X

### Mural Paintings

THE Padmanabhaswami temple is a treasure-house of ancient works of art, such as sculpture, in stone and bronze, mural paintings and wood-carvings.

Mural paintings are found in most temples of Travancore. They are marvellous in quality, purity, expressiveness and show a long tradition in the State. In November, 1940 frescoes of the ninth century A.D. were discovered in the walls of the rock-cut cave temple at Tirunandikara, in South Travancore. In the Suchindrum temple there are paintings belonging to the 11th and 12th centuries. Precious relics of a 14th century painting, belonging to the reign of Aditya Varma Sarvanganatha, a King of Travancore, are seen in the Padmanabhaswami temple. In the Thiruvattar temple some relics of paintings belonging to the 15th century are seen in a damaged state. In the Siva temple at Ettumanur, in North Travancore, there is the fine eight-armed Nataraja fresco belonging to a period not later than the middle of the 16th century, which Dr Coomaraswamy considers the only old example of Dravidian painting. Others belonging to the 16th century are seen on the walls of the topmost floor of the palace at Padmanabhapuram, the ancient capital of the State, and to the 18th century on the walls of the central shrine of the Padmanabhaswami temple.

The paintings in the Padmanabhaswami temple are remarkable for their lustrous colour and



antique dignity. There is a harmony of composition united to a strong cohesion of rhythm. One notices in them that to a perfection of design is added a splendid clarity of colour which gives them a pleasing pictorial quality of great charm and an intensity of feeling. They suggest an inexhaustible fertility of imagination and a keen feeling for form on the part of the ancient artists. An attempt is made below to describe four of the important paintings found in the temple :—

(a) *A Lady's Toilet*.—This painting is really a masterpiece of Indian art. There is a wealth of genuine beauty and charm in it that makes one stand spellbound in admiration. A vibrant life of form, a pictorial cohesion, a surprising atmosphere of simplicity, and a wonderful vitality are seen in this painting. The figures of the maidens are dignified in posture, charming in outlook, and constitute a pleasing *ensemble*.

(b) *Rajarajeswari*.—The distinctive art displayed in this painting discloses an intensity of feeling and subtle charm of colour. It has an abstract expression of perfect quiet about it. In execution, posture, and composition, it is one of unsurpassed excellence. It appears rather crowded with figures, but the expression on their faces is supreme and makes one feel that he is *tete-a-tete* with a sublime power.

(c) *Subramania and Narada*.—The personalities in this old painting throb with exalted life. The facial type of the figures, in particular, is very distinct and expressive. The painting possesses



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considerable simplicity and is not much overburdened with decoration.

(d) *Sasta on Horseback*.—The most eloquent pose is made use of by the talented artist to express the physical and spiritual charms in this painting. Here is boldness of outline and fine texture. The painting looks like one painted from a model in still pose, but it is well-harmonised in that it has a combination of stately and beautiful composition.

These and other paintings in the temple look as fresh and complete as on the day that they were painted. They are charmingly simple, but they give utterance to a mysterious life of the soul; they penetrate the depths of our individual consciousness by their delicate characterisation, arresting faithfulness, and life-like suggestiveness.

Formerly, the temple contained many paintings representing incidents taken from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavatha. Though these frescoes are not mentioned in the inscriptions of the temple, there is every reason to conclude that they were the work of painters under the patronage of King Marthanda Varma. Some of these paintings were destroyed by fire a few years ago. Others have been faithfully copied and are exhibited in the Sri Chitralayam, the only gallery in South India which presents examples of the mural art of India from prehistoric times, down through the Buddhist era of Ajanta to recent times in Travancore and Cochin, together with wonderful examples of Tibetan, Chinese, and Japanese painting.

## CHAPTER XI

### Temple-Entry Proclamation

THE epoch-making temple-entry proclamation was promulgated by His Highness Sri Chitra Thirunal on Nov. 12, 1936, the fifth year of his reign. It was received with rejoicings throughout India, and when all else is forgotten this act of the Maharaja will be remembered by future generations with gratitude.

Never before in the history of the whole world has a ruler blessed his beloved subjects with such a charter of liberty. By throwing open the temples, he has rendered distinct service towards the purification of Hindu religion. By this supreme act of Dharma, he has placed Hinduism on a new path of progress and glory and liberated thousands of untouchables from their age-long misery of ostracism and ignorance, by allowing them to enter the precincts of the temple and bend in adoration before the Supreme. The Proclamation said :

" Profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of our religion, believing that it is based on divine guidance and on all-comprehending toleration, knowing that in its practice it has throughout the centuries adapted itself to the needs of changing times, solicitous that none of our Hindu subjects should, by reason of birth, or caste, or community, be denied the consolations and solace of Hindu faith we have decided and hereby declare, ordain and command that, subject to such rules and conditions as may be laid down and imposed by US for preserving their proper atmosphere and maintaining their rituals and observances, there

should henceforth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by faith or religion on entering or worshipping at the temples controlled by US and our Government."

So long as Hinduism lives this State document will endure, and Nov. 12, 1936 will go down as a great event in the history of Travancore, as the day of liberation. The Hindus will continue to cherish their deep and abiding gratitude to Her Highness the Maharani Sethu Parvati Bai and Sir C. P. Ramaswami Ayyar for their part in bringing about what has been universally acclaimed as a miracle.

As His Highness the Maharaja of Dolpur observed: "His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore has given the biggest charity that any ruler could give to his *prajas* in opening the doors to every class and creed of that much-coveted treasure of spiritual solace."

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